

Soldiers

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Story and Photos by SSG John Valceanu



Soldiers

PREP



WHEN Robert Cook Stanton entered the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School at Fort Monmouth, N.J., five years ago, he never dreamed he would someday be the highest-ranking cadet in his graduating class at West Point. But that's exactly what Stanton managed to become, rising to the rank of cadet first captain — the cadet equivalent of a brigade commander — before graduating as a member of the class of 2000. Stanton credits the USMAPS with giving him the foundation for success at the academy.

"Right after high school, I had spent a year in college and got bored," Stanton said. "I wanted to do something more exciting."

Stanton enlisted in the Army and served as a Korean linguist. After a year as an enlisted soldier, he said, he realized he wanted to go back to college and become an officer. He was considering the Green-to-Gold program when he found out about the prep school.

"I jumped at the chance," he said.

Stanton said the prep school allowed him to strengthen his academic skills, particularly in mathematics. It also allowed him to focus and prepare himself for the rigors of one of the most challenging undergraduate programs to be found anywhere.

Eric Gutier, another West Point cadet who graduated this year, also said he benefited considerably from his experience at the prep school.

"I didn't take college preparatory

It's not all academics for cadet candidates at the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School.



Approximately half of the cadet candidates in each prep school class are former enlisted soldiers.

math courses in high school because I didn't think I'd go to college," Gutier said. "I was really behind in math when I showed up at the prep school, but I studied math 3 hours a day, and I got caught up enough to make it through West Point."

Like Stanton, Gutier was an enlisted soldier before attending the preparatory school. He joined the Army in 1992, and was a telecommunications operator in the 10th Mountain Division before putting in a packet for the prep school.

"I knew I wanted to go to college, and I also wanted to stay in the Army," Gutier said. "I was trying to figure out what to do, when an NCO told me about the prep school. I'll never forget him. I owe him a lot."

Approximately half of the cadet candidates in each prep school class

are former enlisted soldiers like Stanton and Gutier. Other soldiers enter the prep school straight out of high school. These soldiers, called "IRs" because they are considered "invitational Reservists," are typically strong candidates for admission to West Point, but they may lack certain skills they need to be successful at the military academy. The prep school helps them build those skills.

"My math scores on the SATs were not quite high enough to get me admitted to West Point," said Cadet Candidate Melanie Crevier. "I had a choice of going to another college or coming here, and I chose to come to the prep school."

Crevier said she's wanted to attend the military academy since 8th grade.

"I've always dreamed of a career as an Army officer, because it would

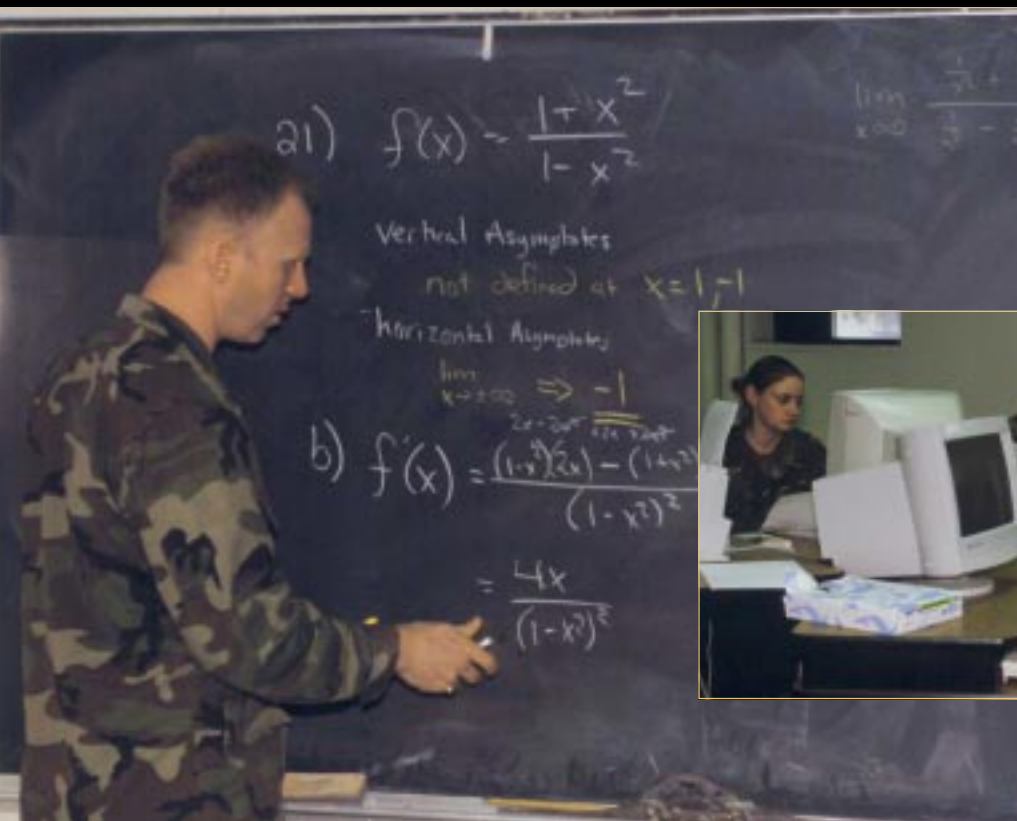
allow me to do something bigger with my life than sitting around pushing paper for a company that doesn't mean anything to me," she said.

Marko Kostovic is another IR cadet candidate who chose to attend the prep school right after high school. He was not initially as committed to attending West Point as Crevier, and he said he considered attending a civilian university when he was not granted direct admission to the military academy.

"I thought about going to college somewhere else, but when they offered me a chance to come to the prep school I took it," Kostovic said. "I definitely made the right choice. I'm learning a lot, and I'll eventually be able to attend West Point. This is a great deal any way you look at it."

SPC John Thompson said he almost passed up the great deal because he didn't want to continue a family tradition.

"My brother and sister both went through the prep school and on to West Point. I didn't want to come here because of them, I wanted to do my own thing," he said. "But, in the end, I realized it was too good a deal to pass up. I didn't do that well in high school, especially in math, but here I got caught up and it even put me ahead."



(Left) MAJ James Sorensen, a USMAPS mathematics instructor, writes out a formula on the blackboard. **(Above)** Cadet candidates undertake research on computers in one of the school's study rooms.

Crevier said IRs have a good relationship with prior-service cadet candidates because they learn to depend on each other.

"We help each other out. We look to them for advice and support in military stuff, and we help them with academic stuff," Crevier said. "The academics are usually easier for us than for some people who have been out of the classroom for a while."

Academic courses focus on mathematics and English, but cadet candidates also receive instruction in study skills and time management through the Student Success Course.

The prep school's academic year lasts 10 months and consists of four quarters, each of 40 classroom days.

Cadet candidates are placed into specialized tracks based on their performance halfway through the first quarter of classroom work, and on their performance on a series of diagnostic tests they take at the beginning of the academic year.

This approach allows candidates to improve in weak areas while continuing to enhance their strong areas. Tracks range in difficulty from basic to very advanced. During the academic year candidates can move between tracks, and upward movement is encouraged whenever possible.

The Student Success Course gives candidates tools that will help them throughout their academic and military careers. These include effective reading, notebook organization, note taking, goal setting, time management and memory devices. SSC also includes classes in stress management and overcoming "test phobia." Students are expected to apply the techniques to their current classes.

Dr. Matthew Ignoffo is an instructor in the SSC and the English department. He said one of his biggest challenges is to make students see the importance of academics.

"A lot of our students are very focused on athletics. Athletics are important, but I have to get through to them that they are here to prepare to learn how to be officers," Ignoffo said. "They will need to know how to think critically and communicate effectively."



Eligibility Requirements

Active-duty and reserve-component soldiers may apply for admission to the U.S. Military Academy Prep School if they meet these criteria:

- ✪ Be a citizen of the United States or be eligible for citizenship prior to entering the academy.
- ✪ Be at least 17, but not yet 22, years old prior to July 1 of the year entering the preparatory school.
- ✪ Be unmarried, with no legal obligation to support dependents, and not pregnant.
- ✪ Be in good health, with no disqualifying medical defects.
- ✪ Be a high school graduate or the equivalent. High school courses should have been of a college-preparatory nature. Recommended courses include four years of mathematics, including trigonometry; four years of English; two years of a laboratory science; two years of a foreign language; one year of U.S. history. Additionally, scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test or the American College Test are competitively evaluated.
- ✪ Be in good physical shape and demonstrate good physical skills.
- ✪ Be of high moral character with no felony convictions and no history of venereal disease or narcotic addictions.
- ✪ Be highly motivated and determined to complete the USMAPS and U.S. Military Academy programs and to serve as an Army officer.

Specific eligibility information is subject to change. For current and specific information, Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers should write to:

Director of Admissions, U.S. Military Academy, ATTN: Soldier Admissions, West Point, NY 10996-1797. Or call (914) 938-4041 or (DSN) 688-4041. — SSG John Valceanu



Cadet candidates finish the final portion of their two-mile run during an Army physical fitness test. One of the functions served by the Prep School is to ensure that cadet candidates are fit when they arrive at West Point.



The prep school requires that students maintain at least a C average in each of their classes.

Ignoffo said many of the students come from high schools that were not very academically demanding, and they are surprised by the level of performance expected of them at the prep school.

"They may have been A and B students in their high schools, but they get here and get C and D grades," Ignoffo said. "The truth is that their high schools may not have been asking very much of them."

The prep school requires that students maintain at least a C average in each of their classes. If their average drops below C, instructors provide students with remedial instruction.

"We are not here to fail people. We work with them and try to get them up to a level that will allow them to be successful at the academy," Ignoffo said.

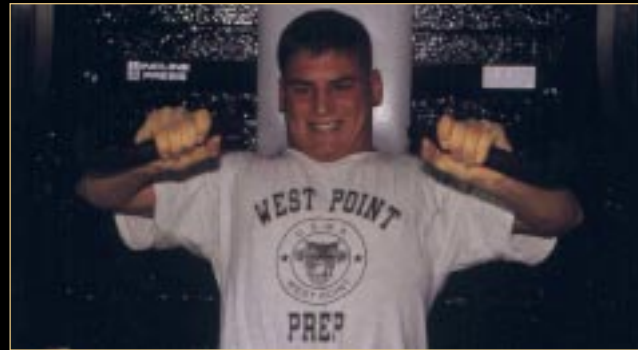
For Ignoffo, the most rewarding part of his job is "when a student really takes an interest in his academic and intellectual improvement, when I realize I've managed to stimulate someone's brain."

COL Michael Anderson, USMAPS commandant and instructor, said he is rewarded by knowing that the school is providing a service to the military academy and to the Army.

When cadet candidates arrive at West Point and become bona fide cadets, they have an edge over other cadets who enter the academy straight from high school, Anderson said.

Known as "prepsters," graduates of the prep school become natural leaders at the academy. This is especially true during "Beast Barracks," the West Point version of basic training, held during the summer for incoming first-year cadets.

"Prepsters naturally know a lot more about the Army than the other cadets who are fresh out of high school. This is true both for those who are prior service and those who weren't. During their time at the prep school, the students who came straight



Cadet candidate Marko Kostovic works out at the prep school's gym during some personal time.

from high school learn a lot about the Army," Anderson said. "They learn how to keep their room so they can pass inspection. They learn how to wear the uniforms. And, most importantly, they learn military discipline."

Anderson said prepsters are a true asset to each West Point class, and the academy makes good use of them by ensuring that they are sprinkled throughout each platoon.

CPT Ralph Hudnall, a company tactical officer, agreed with Anderson.

"We produce the 'core of the corps,' and we take that mission seriously," Hudnall said. "We work toward all our cadet candidates becoming soldiers, and we expect them to be the best of the best when they get up to the military academy."

Hudnall said prepsters are usually more mature than other West Point cadets and they "know how to get things done." He said that West Point tactical officers, his counterparts at the military academy, expect more from prepsters than they do from cadets fresh out of high school. And almost always, their expectations are fulfilled.

As a company commander at the prep school, Hudnall said, he couldn't have asked for a better experience.

"These are some of the top young people in the country, and they're working toward going to one of the country's top schools," Hudnall said. "As a CO here, I've had an opportunity



Cadet candidate David Derochick hurls a pitch during a baseball game against the U.S. Naval Academy preparatory school.

to work much more closely with them than a normal company commander. I've really enjoyed my time here."

In addition to academics and military discipline, physical fitness training is an integral part of life at the prep school. The physical training program ensures that prep school graduates can pass the Army Physical Fitness Test and the Physical Aptitude Examination required for admission to the military academy.

The prep school's physical fitness program also includes a test of basic swimming skills. If cadet candidates are unable to perform the tasks, they are enrolled in a swimming class.

In addition to the various physical education courses offered, cadet candidates also can participate in intramural and varsity team sports. The varsity teams are pitted against the Navy's prep school, as well as teams from West Point and other colleges.

Cadet candidate James Leidenberg credits the prep school physical education program for awakening his athletic tendencies. As a private in the Army, he ran as part of his regular physical fitness training, but it wasn't until he came to the prep school that he began running seriously. He now competes in marathons.

Leidenberg said he had always loved the idea of going to West Point but he thought it was out of his reach — a dream destined never to come true. He was going to get out of the Army and go to college on the GI Bill. Then someone mentioned he ought to consider applying to the prep school.

"The dream suddenly fell into place, and I've been in love ever since," Leidenberg said. "The prep school is a great institution. There is a lot of honor here, and there are a lot of values to which I might not have been exposed if I hadn't come here. I've had the chance to be a cadet candidate company commander and editor of the yearbook. I'm definitely learning to be a leader." □



Cadet candidates use teamwork to clamber over an obstacle course during the Sandhurst competition, an international event that pits American, English and Canadian cadets against each other.